NUMB. LXI.

The SPECTATOR.

Non equidem ſtudeo, bullatis ut mihi nugis
Pagina turgeſcat, dare pondus idonea fumo. Perſ.

Thurſday, May 10. 1711.

THERE is no kind of falſe Wit which has been ſo recommended by the Practice of all Ages, as that which conſiſts in a Jingle of Words, and is comprehended under the general Name of *Punning*. It is indeed impoſſible to kill a Weed, which the Soil has a natural Diſpoſition to produce. The Seeds of Punning are in the Minds of all Men, and tho' they may be ſtifled by Reaſon, Reflection and good Senſe, they will be very apt to ſhoot up in the greateſt Genius that is not broken and cultivated by the Rules of Art. Imitation is natural to us, and when it does not raiſe the Mind to Poetry, Painting, Muſick, or other more noble Arts, it often breaks out in Punns and Quibbles.

Ariſtotle, in the Eleventh Chapter of his Book of Rhetorick, deſcribes two or three kinds of Punns, which he calls Paragrams, among the Beauties of good Writing, and produces Inſtances of them out of ſome of the greateſt Authors in the *Greek* Tongue. *Cicero* has ſprinkled ſeveral of his Works with Punns, and in his Book where he lays down the Rules of Oratory, quotes abundance of Sayings as Pieces of Wit, which alſo upon Examination prove arrant Punns. But the Age in which *the Punn* chiefly flouriſhed, was the Reign of King *James* the Firſt. That learned Monarch was himſelf a tolerable Punnſter, and made very few Biſhops or Privy-Counſellors that had not ſome time or other ſignalized themſelves by a Clinch, or a *Conundrum*. It was therefore in this Age that the Punn appeared with Pomp and Dignity. It had before been admitted into merry Speeches and ludicrous Compoſitions, but was now delivered with great Gravity from the Pulpit, or pronounced in the moſt ſolemn manner at the Council-Table. The greateſt Authors, in their moſt ſerious Works, made frequent uſe of Punns. The Sermons of Biſhop *Andrews*, and the Tragedies of *Shakeſpear*, are full of them. The Sinner was punned into Repentance by the former, as in the Latter nothing is more uſual than to ſee a Hero weeping and quibbling for a dozen Lines together.

I muſt add to theſe great Authorities, which ſeem to have given a kind of Sanction to this Piece of falſe Wit, that all the Writers of Rhetorick have treated of Punning with very great Reſpect, and divided the ſeveral kinds of it into hard Names, that are reckoned among the Figures of Speech, and recommended as Ornaments in Diſcourſe. I remember a Country School-maſter of my Acquaintance told me once, that he had been in Company with a Gentleman whom he looked upon to be the greateſt *Paragrammatiſt* among the Moderns. Upon Enquiry, I found my learned Friend had dined that Day with Mr. *Swan*, the famous Punnſter; and deſiring him to give me ſome Acount of Mr. *Swan*'s Converſation, he told me that he generally talked in the *Paranomaſia*, that he ſometimes gave into the *Plocè*, but that in his humble Opinion he ſhined moſt in the *Antanaclaſis*.

I muſt not here omit, that a famous Univerſity of this Land was formerly very much infeſted with Punns; but whether or no this might not ariſe from the Fens and Marſhes in which it was ſituated, and which are now drain'd, I muſt leave to the Determination of more skilful Naturaliſts.

After this ſhort Hiſtory of Punning, one would wonder how it ſhould be ſo entirely baniſh'd out of the Learned World, as it is at preſent, eſpecially ſince it had found a Place in the Writings of the moſt ancient Polite Authors. To account for this, we muſt conſider, that the firſt Race of Authors, who were the great Heroes in Writing, were deſtitute of all Rules and Arts of Criticiſm; and for that Reaſon, though they excel later Writers in Greatneſs of Genius, they fall ſhort of them in Accuracy and Correctneſs. The Moderns cannot reach their Beauties, but can avoid their Imperfections. When the World was furniſh'd with theſe Authors of the firſt Eminence, there grew up another Set of Writers, who gained themſelves a Reputation by the Remarks which they made on the Works of thoſe who preceded them. It was one of the Employments of theſe Secondary Authors, to diſtinguiſh the ſeveral kinds of Wit by Terms of Art, and to conſider them as more or leſs perfect, according as they were founded in Truth. It is no wonder therefore, that even ſuch Authors as *Iſocrates*, *Plato* and *Cicero*, ſhould have ſuch little Blemiſhes as are not to be met with in Authors of a much inferior Character, who have written ſince thoſe

those several Blemishes were discover'd. I do not find that there was a proper Separation made between Punns and fine Wit by any of the ancient Authors, except *Quintilian* and *Longinus*. But when this Distinction was once setled, it was very natural for all Men of Sense to agree in it. As for the Revival of this false Wit, it happen'd about the time of the Revival of Letters, but as soon as it was once detected, it immediately vanish'd and disappear'd. At the same time there is no Question, but as it has sunk in one Age and rose in another, it will again recover it self in some distant Period of Time, as Pedantry and Ignorance shall prevail upon Wit and Sense. And, to speak the Truth, I do very much apprehend, by some of the last Winter's Productions, which had their Sets of Admirers, that our Posterity will in a few Years degenerate into a Race of Punnsters: At least, a Man may be very excusable for any Apprehensions of this kind, that has seen *Acrosticks* handed about the Town with great Secresie and Applause; to which I must also add a little *Epigram* called the *Witches Prayer*, that fell into Verse when it was read either backward or forward, excepting only, that it Curs'd one way and Bless'd the other. When one sees there are actually such Pains-takers among our *British* Wits, who can tell what it may end in? If we must Lash one another, let it be with the manly Strokes of Wit and Satyr; for I am of the old Philosopher's Opinion, That if I must suffer from one or the other, I would rather it should be from the Paw of a Lion, than the Hoof of an Ass. I do not speak this out of any Spirit of Party. There is a most crying Dulness on both sides. I have seen Tory *Acrosticks* and Whig *Anagrams*, and do not quarrel with either of them, because they are *Whigs* or *Tories*, but because they are *Anagrams* and *Acrosticks*.

But to return to Punning. Having pursued the History of a Punn, from its Original to its Downfal, I shall here define it to be a Conceit arising from the use of two Words that agree in the Sound, but differ in the Sense. The only way therefore to try a Piece of Wit is to translate it into a different Language, if it bears the Test you may pronounce it true; but if it vanishes in the Experiment, you may conclude it to be a Punn. In short, one may say of a Punn as the Country-man described his Nightingale, that it is *vox & præterea nihil*, a Sound, and nothing but a Sound. On the contrary, one may represent true Wit by the Description which *Aristinetus* makes of a fine Woman, When she is *dress'd* she is Beautiful, when she is *undress'd* she is Beautiful: Or, as *Mercerus* has translated it, *Induitur, formosa est: Exuitur, ipsa forma est.*

ERRATA.

In Numb. LX. Col. 1. Line 53. for *Called by the Name of* Mary Boon, read *known by the Name of the Lady* Mary Boon.

Compleat Setts of this Paper, for the Month of April, are to be sold by Mr. Graves in St. James's Street; Mr. Lewis under Tom's Coffee-House, Covent-Garden; Mr. Lillie, Perfumer, the Corner of Beauford-Buildings; Mr. Sanger at the Temple Gate, Mr. Knapton in St. Paul's Church-Yard, Mr. Round in Exchange Ally, and Mrs. Baldwin in Warwick-lane, where also may be had those for the Month of March.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

At the Desire of several Ladies of Quality,
For the Benefit of Mrs. Knight,
By Her Majesty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane, this present Thursday, the 10th of May, will be presented a Comedy, called The Tender Husband; or, The Accomplish'd Fools. The part of Biddy to be perform'd by Mrs. Oldfield, Sir Harry Gubbin by Mr. Bullock, Tipkin by Mr. Norris, Mr. Clermont by Mr. Mills, Captain Clermont by Mr. Wilks, Humphrey Gubbin by Mr. Penkethman, Mrs. Pounce by Mr. Estcourt, Mrs. Clermont by Mrs. Bradshaw, Aunt by Mrs. Powell. To which will be added, a Farce, of one Act only, call'd, The Stage Coach. Tickets may be had at Mr. Linton's, Bookseller in Fleet-Street. And to Morrow, being Friday, will be presented a Comedy, call'd, Love makes the Man, or the Fop's Fortune. For the Benefit of Mr. Bowen.

This Play is sold by Jacob Tonson at Shakespear's Head over against Catherine-street in the Strand.

The late Mr. Thomas Brown's Pictures (being a curious but small Collection of the most eminent Masters) will be sold by Auction this Day being the 10th Instant. The Sale will begin at 12 a Clock in the Forenoon, at the late Monsieur Lyoncrown's House in Leicester-Fields, the white Posts on West Side of the Square. The Pictures are to be seen this Day, before the Sale, and Catalogues had Gratis. There is likewise a Parcel of excellent Prints and Drawings of the most eminent Masters, with 6 large Pieces of Tapestry Hangings belonging to the same person. The House is to be Lett with a Stable for 7 Horses, and a Coach-house.

In a few Days will be Publish'd,

The true Time of keeping St. Matthias's Day in Leap Years, further shewn in a second familiar Conference between a Churchman and a Dissenter. [Wherein will be inserted Archbishop Bancroft's Order concerning the Time of keeping it in the Year 1684, with a Vindication thereof.] Printed for J. Downing in Bartholomew-Close, J. Knapton, J. Wyat, R. Knaplock, J. Bonwick, W. Clements, H. Clements, and J. Holland in St. Paul's Churchyard, J. Bowyer and J. Baker in Lodge-street, London. Where may be had by the same Author, The true Time of keeping St. Matthias's Day in Leap Year, shewn in a familiar Conference between a Churchman and a Dissenter. Wherein is inserted Dr. Wallis's Letter to Bishop Fell on that Subject, A. D. 1684. Never Printed before. The Lawfulness and right Manner of keeping Christmas, Price 3 d. each. And the Rule for finding Easter in the Book of Common Prayer, [which has through a Misunderstanding thereof been supposed to fail this Year] Explained; and recommended as proper to be Bound with Common Prayers. Price Half-Penny, or 3 s. per 100. And in a short time will be publish'd by the same Author, The Rule for finding Easter, &c. Explained and Vindicated; [Wherein Directions will be given for finding the Ecclesiastical New Moon, the Dominical Letter, &c. Together with a Table of the Lunar and Solar Cycles, Golden Number, and Dominical Letters for 532 Years; shewing, that the Full Moon is the 15th Day inclusive from the New Moon; and a Preface giving an Historical Account of the Rule and the several Objections made against it.] Price 6 d.

In a few Days will be Publish'd

The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, the First Archbishop of Canterbury in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth. Under whose Primacy and Influence the Reformation of Religion was happily Effected; and the Church of England Restored, and Established upon the Principles whereon it stands to this Day. Wherein are related the said Archbishop's Actions in Ecclesiastical Commissions and Synods: His Visitations of the Dioceses, Colleges and Hospitals within his Province, with his Injunctions and Regulations: Characters and Accounts of the Bishops by him Consecrated: His Endeavours for Uniformity: His Diligence in Restoring, and Publishing many Statutes and other Ancient Historical MSS. of this Nation: His Procuring a more correct Translation of the Holy Bible: His Government of his own Diocese of Canterbury: His sober Thoughts, Counsels and Cares for Religion and this Church: And many Particulars of the Ecclesiastical History of those Times, hitherto Unknown, or very Obscure, are discovered and brought to Light. Compiled Faithfully out of Records, Registers, State-Papers, Orders of Council, Authentic Letters, and sundry other Original MSS. In Four Books. To which is added, An Appendix, containing various Transcripts of Records, Letters, Instruments, Ordinances, Commissions, Discourses, Relations, Intelligences, and other secret Papers, above an Hundred in Number; for the Asserting or Illustrating the foregoing History. Among which will be found the Latin Life of this A. Bp. Ecclesiæ Matthæus, so much and so long wanted in the Editions of the British Antiquities. By John Strype, M. A. Printed for John Wyat at the Rose in St. Paul's Church-yard.

This Day is publish'd,

The Passion of Sappho, and Feast of Alexander. Set to Musick by Mr. Thomas Clayton. As it is Performed at his House in York-Buildings. Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Shakespear's Head over-against Catherine-street in the Strand.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-Lane*; where Advertisements are taken in: as also by *Charles Lillie*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings*, in the *Strand*.